

FAILURES IN NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES

The Case of the Cuban Missiles

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SINCE World War II, two interrelated events have transformed the scope and character of foreign intelligence operations. Governments have become heavily dependent on intelligence estimates in choosing and implementing foreign and military policies. At the same time, intelligence work has become modernized, bureaucratized, and professionalized. The procurement of information has come to depend relatively less on cloak-and-dagger methods and more on the systematic gathering of data from essentially public sources. The professional intelligence bureaucracies—or the “intelligence community,” as these services are called in Washington—have accordingly benefited from the infusion of both skilled personnel and conceptualization from a variety of professions, including notably history and the social sciences.

The social science literature on problems of foreign intelligence is nevertheless extremely small.¹ This is regrettable because historians and social scientists have developed and are developing skills that should permit substantial contributions to the theory and even to the practice of intelligence. However, since the work of the intelligence services is necessarily classified, very little material appears in the public domain and academic scholars are deprived of the information on which to base relevant researches.

Occasionally, an interesting document does reach the public. This is the case with the recent Stennis Report on the failure of the U.S. intelligence community to predict the deployment of Soviet intermediate and

¹ Roger Hilsman, *Strategic Intelligence and National Decisions* (Glencoe, Ill., 1956); Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton 1949); George S. Pettee, *The Future of American Secret Intelligence* (Washington 1946); Washington Platt, *Strategic Intelligence Production* (New York 1957); Harry Howe Ransom, *Central Intelligence and National Security* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958). There are also the following papers: Max F. Millikan, “Inquiry and Policy: The Relation of Knowledge to Action,” in *The Human Meaning of the Social Sciences*, ed. by Daniel Lerner (New York 1959), 158-80; Harold D. Lasswell, “Strategies of Inquiry: The Rational Use of Observation,” in *ibid.*, 89-113; Benno Wasserman, “The Failure of Intelligence Prediction,” *Political Studies*, viii (June 1960), 156-69; Allan Evans, “Intelligence and Policy Formation,” *World Politics*, xii (October 1959), 84-91; Willmoore Kendall, “The Function of Intelligence,” *ibid.*, i (July 1949), 542-52.

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